

Dear Friends,

“Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good – habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action.”

Those words by psychologist and author Thomas Lickona reflect the essence of South Carolina’s Character Education initiative, begun nearly a dozen years ago. Through this program, South Carolina Department of Education staff promote comprehensive character development among our young people by advancing knowledge, encouraging partnerships, and creating opportunities for professional development.

In South Carolina, character education efforts have a broad base of support that includes the business community and numerous cities and communities of character – all who recognize how important good character is in the workplace and for success in life. As a matter of fact, the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce and its constituent businesses initiated the effort to include a character development measure on the annual school report card. And a diverse group of school and community representatives, the South Carolina Character Development Partnership Team, serves as our program’s advisors.

In just over a month, the 2008 South Carolina Character Education Conference will be held at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. One of the exciting aspects of this April 4-5 gathering is that it features dual tracks for both youth leaders and educators. Break-out sessions will include innovative strategies, best practices, and current trends in leadership and character development.

On April 4, the State Schools of Character Program, a recognition program for outstanding work in character education, will be introduced. Janice Stoodley, director of the National Schools of Character Awards Program, will officiate at the program’s kick-off.

Schools and districts participating in character education programs are eligible to receive a State Schools of Character award in addition to possible nomination for the National Schools of Character award. The expanded scope of the NSOC program has increased the number of outstanding schools and districts sharing best practices, localized the mentoring network among educators, and identified exemplary state sites to serve as models. Schools and Districts of Character will also be named and celebrated, and their programs and activities will become part of a best practices publication. There will also be opportunities for schools and districts to receive monetary awards to help enhance their programs and provide outreach to other educators.

Keynote speakers are Dr. Phillip Vincent, author of “Restoring School Civility” and “Developing Character in Students,” and Dr. Hal Urban, author of “Positive Words, Powerful Results” and “The 100 Simple Secrets of Happy People.” Vincent has taught at all grade levels in North Carolina and Alaska, and has taught graduate education courses at North Carolina State University. He has worked with more than 26 states in formulating and implementing character education programs. Urban is a former award-winning teacher who has traveled more than a million miles and has made more than 800 presentations in thirty-seven states and five foreign

countries. He speaks to businesses, healthcare, service, and faith-based organizations. Both men are recipients of the Sanford N. McDonnell Lifetime Achievement Award in Character.

The 2008 South Carolina Character Education Conference promises to be a great opportunity for networking among educators and agencies interested in our young people and in ways to further strengthen their character. **Registration** is still open. For additional information, contact **Joan Dickinson** at 803-734-4807.

Together, we can ensure that all of our students gain a clear sense of what is right and wrong and, ultimately, make the choice to do what is right.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education